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ABSTRACT

Defining teaching as "the way we bring ourselves to the learners" at the current moment, this paper describes "Enterprise Talk," a measurable, practical guide for talking to children in times of difficulty and responding with effective positives. After discussing how teachers teach (i.e., teachers model; teachers inform; teachers respond positively to what they value), the paper talks about ineffective habits that are barriers to establishing a positive relationship between teacher and learner. The paper then discusses implementation of Enterprise Talk to help teachers set aside these ineffective habits. The components of Enterprise Talk are described, including prohibitions (i.e., no directions, no questions, and no praise) and guides for speaking and supporting behavior (i.e., descriptions, narrations, self-talk, non-verbal recognition, intrinsically phrased rewards, and descriptive cue sequence). The paper concludes by noting that Enterprise Talk reminds teachers to model, inform, and respond positively to what they value. (Author/HTH)

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Enterprise Talk: A Handrail to Integrity and Authenticity

Tom Drummond

Abstract

"Enterprise Talk" is a measurable, practical guide for talking to children in times of difficulty and responding with effective positives. After discussing how teachers teach (i.e., teachers model; teachers inform; teachers respond positively to what they value), the paper talks about ineffective habits that are barriers to establishing a positive relationship between teacher and learner. The paper then discusses implementation of Enterprise Talk to help teachers set aside these ineffective habits. The components of Enterprise Talk are described, including prohibitions (i.e., no directions, no questions, and no praise) and guides for speaking and supporting behavior (i.e., descriptions, narrations, self-talk, nonverbal recognition, intrinsically phrased rewards, and descriptive cue sequence). Enterprise Talk reminds teachers to model, inform, and respond positively to what they value.

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Tom Drummond

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When used as a job description, the word "teaching" has solid meaning. It slips into formlessness when used to represent the labyrinthine complexity of facilitating educative experiences for individuals and groups. For the purpose of this discussion, I am using the word "teaching" to refer to a particular aspect of the endeavor—*the way we bring ourselves to the learners in the moment of here and now.* I believe we all can move closer to levels of excellence by exploring this aspect of teaching within the framework of what I call "Enterprise Talk."

I am not referring here to the stage-setting competencies of teaching—the all-consuming time and energy a teacher spends creating the physical conditions for the learners to experience, planning, gathering, documenting, and reflecting. This "before and after" side of teaching surely has its challenges. What I am addressing is the "with" side of teaching—the facilitative leadership component—the being with each child in an enhancing way—the managing of the social influences that support and sustain a learning community.

Teaching lives in the relationship a teacher has with the learner. At the same time as being true to ourselves, we, as teachers, face the challenge of being with learners in a way that allows the learners to be themselves, too. Great teachers are comfortable playing in the complexity and ambiguity of an enhancing interpersonal relationship—flowing freely and fearlessly—giving learners the gift of being completely present with unconditional, positive regard.

The quality of the relationship with each learner depends upon the teacher's ability, not only to be present in the moment, but also to be present with *integrity* and *authenticity*. Effective teaching, therefore, requires that teachers intentionally invest in clarifying what they value and truly being who they are. All good teachers I know have the courage to talk openly about their values and the wisdom to attend to their humanity:

- We have integrity when we steadfastly act as we say and believe.
- We are authentic when we are being, in each moment, true to the depth of our spirit.

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As teachers "walk their talk" being true to themselves, they gradually form the person they are as teachers. Their effectiveness is increased by constantly reexamining their comfortable habits and observing with fresh eyes their relationships with learners. Their path is illuminated by what is true deep within their own humanity and reflected in their evolving understandings of what is best for learners. The quest for understanding is continuously present in each encounter. In these moments, teachers have the opportunity to lay aside ingrained habits and delve into alternative ways of being. Integrity and authenticity require teachers, in the moment of dissonance, to take risks in how they are acting with learners without firm, objective means of assurance. Any support they get for evolving out of mismatched habits comes in their own personal dawning awareness of finding themselves *being a richer way*.

When we, as teachers, discover that our professed values, such as eagerness and creative expression, are now present in the behavior of our learners, we become more assured that we have created the appropriate climate. We know we are traveling on the path of increasing effectiveness because we discover it under our feet. We face difficulty nurturing our own development, in this "being with learners" aspect of teaching, because we travel alone, with only our own feedback, which is often nebulous and delayed. Describing this process in words seems complex, but the process itself is essentially natural. Experiencing it requires maintaining the mirrors in which we see our actions and pursuing dialogue with others that supports the evolution of our own understanding. In order to have a dialogue about improvement, we have to find words that convey the goal. Teachers must know how to describe with assurance what it means when things are "right."

I offer here, therefore, a way to formulate, in language, the experience of success in teaching. I believe what I do is "right" when

- I see the learners doing what I value, and
- I am being the person I most want to be.

"Right" has both experiences aligned. Together they resonate, impelling learning forward.

The Learners Doing What I Value

As a preschool teacher, I treasured deep discussions with my colleagues about what we wanted to see happen for children. These both heated and laughter-filled discussions gradually clarified my values. Enterprise Talk evolved from that dialogue.

My colleagues and I were happy when we saw children being who they were, individually and uniquely, engaged in actions that they chose, at once benefiting themselves and the group. We enjoyed seeing children having fun, laughing, and being playful while doing real work, alone and with their peers, achieving group goals cooperatively. We liked seeing children willingly step into something new, staying focused on their intentions until they achieved their chosen ends. We were thrilled when children recognized the significance of their personal expression and when they spontaneously celebrated everyone's achievements. What emerged was a picture of children with *enterprise*, willing to venture with boldness into areas of risk.

I believe the experience of *enterprise* is possible for all children. I believe a worthy goal for early childhood education is to send all of our children into elementary schools as responsible individuals with a passion for exploring, expressing, and cooperating. I believe that, while maintaining the richness of our diversity, we can agree upon a set of values such as these that lie at the core of a cooperative learning community.

However, *teachers cannot make children be this way*. Learners grow in productive ways because they choose to. No amount of prodding creates *enterprise*. You can't push a string.

How We Really Teach

In pursuit of a deeper understanding of teaching, I have watched hundreds of hours of videotape, talking in detail with the teachers involved. Despite their individuality, I began to see how all the facilitative actions of great teachers fell into three fundamental categories:

Teachers model. They act as they want learners to act. If they want learners to be friendly toward each

other, they are friendly. If they want people to laugh, they laugh. If they want the community to create beauty and order, they create beauty and order themselves.

Teachers inform. They tell about things. They describe happenings. They recount events. They tell stories. They explain. They talk about opportunities, problems, and possibilities. They share what they have seen and done.

Teachers respond positively to what they value. They take care to respond with warmth and support in a way that fits each individual. As they lead learners into areas of risk and potential incompetence, they support incremental goodness in the direction they wish learners to grow.

When I think of the people who have made the greatest difference in my life, I can see these fundamentals operating in our relationship. Each was an example of someone who lived a rich, full life in accord with his or her expressed ideals (*model*). Each told tales of his or her life and opened worlds of possibility and promise that were not present to me before (*inform*). When I took tentative steps into new endeavors, each was supportive and affirming (*respond positively*).

To model, inform, and respond positively is to choose a path that lets others be who they are. It leaves choices for them open and yet affects them strongly. These three fundamentals of teaching form the central basis of influence we have with others. The challenge is to learn to behave this way consistently, despite our habits.

Recognizing Habits

Whether we admit it or not, we are our habits—reacting in ways that we have practiced. Although we may profess an understanding of teaching, behaving as great teachers is tough. It is difficult for anyone to be other than how they have been.

When I am healthy… When I am rested… When life at home is calm… When the children seem to like what they are doing… When the moon and stars are in proper alignment… When you-know-who is absent… I can model the way I want children to be, inform without pushing, and spread warmth and good cheer. But, give me trouble, give me stress, test me with the unexpected, and I become a less flexible person. Out of my anxiety and discomfort, I speak in tones of disapproval and control. I find myself trapped in battles of will, and I hear myself complaining and casting blame. I snuff the children's spirit out like a candle. This is not the teacher I am inside, but it is the teacher I am being.

It is a paradox: when my children need teaching, my *being with* them, the most, I am not present. I have become old habits. I have lost my authenticity.

I want control, and I want compliance—the antithesis of *enterprise*—so my words and actions in that moment are not in accord with my expressed values. I have lost my integrity.

Being the Person I Most Want to Be

In times like this, I want a way to self-correct. I want a handrail—something solid to grasp—something to help me set aside these dominant, ineffective habits—something to help me create a positive path from within—something to rekindle my humanity, reminding me of my positive regard for children. If I spill milk, I want to clean it up.

I offer you Enterprise Talk, the handrail I have found to stay in accord with my integrity and authenticity. It is a measurable, practical guide for talking to children in times of difficulty and responding with effective positives. It is the means of maintaining a path you choose for yourself. It is a way for you to practice expressing yourself to children, in the moment, outside of the constraints of old habits. Enterprise Talk reminds you to model, inform, and respond positively to what you value.

Enterprise Talk

The Prohibitions

The first three rules of Enterprise Talk are No Directions, No Questions, and No Praise. Enterprise Talk forces you to set these habits aside and take on the challenge of finding another way to talk.

No Directions

"Sit down." "Hang your coat over there." "Put those on the shelf." "Use your words." "Stop that." "I need you to put it away."

I invite you to stop telling other people what to do. In some cases, directions constitute most of what teachers say to children. When a child is told what to do, he or she has only two choices: (1) do as requested—*acquiesce*, or (2) not do as requested—*rebel*. Neither acquiescence nor rebellion is a value I hold for children. I want children in my community to take the initiative to act responsibly for the good of themselves and the good of others. In environments filled with directions, children wait to do things until directed and become, in turn, directive with each other.

No Questions

"What are you supposed to be doing right now?" "Where does your coat go?" "How do you think she feels when you do that?" "What should you say to him?" "Why did you do that?"

I invite you to stop asking questions. Most of us have been told that asking questions is a good idea, and some types of questions are indeed worthwhile. Questions can encourage thinking, questions can inquire in conversations, and questions can test knowledge. Enterprise Talk does not prohibit these kinds of questions. For example, you can make natural inquiries in conversation ("When did your grandmother come?"), if you genuinely want to know. Often, however, teachers use questions to manage behavior, as in the collection above. I advocate stopping all questions initially, to heighten awareness of your own habits. Later, as the distinctions become clear, you can reinstate the kinds of questions that are genuine and successfully enhance learning.

No Praise

"Good job." "Good for you!" "Lovely." "I like the way Mary and Louise are sitting." "Nice, Jenny!"

I invite you to stop praising what children do. "That's a beautiful picture!" is praise, "Wow, another picture!" is not; the first passes a judgment upon the work, the second enthusiastically affirms its existence. No praise means stopping the *judgmental* positives, the phrases that contain opinions. Praise is contrary to *enterprise*: praise engenders approval seeking, rather than one's own sense of accomplishment; praise may not match the child's experience; praise is often more habitual than authentic; praise, if highlighting one child's work, may cause other children to see their efforts in a dimmer light. Praise often, therefore, does not work.

When people first hear these prohibitions, they are often aghast. These admonitions fly in the face of cultural ways of dealing with children. That is their purpose—to cork the tendency to blurt out—to give time to connect. Stopping the directions, questions, and praise opens the opportunity to access something more honest, effective, and consistent with your values.

The Guides

With habits blocked, the Guides of Enterprise Talk offer the means to express yourself with integrity and authenticity. The first three Guides—Descriptions, Narrations, and Self-Talk—help you formulate what you say in accord with what you value. Nonverbal Recognition and Intrinsically Phrased Rewards help you express genuine positives that light children's eyes. The Descriptive Cue Sequence helps you navigate around those times when you "just have to" get children to do something. Systematically employing the Guides will transform your teaching.

Descriptions

"You have a yellow bolt." "Four of you are working together." "Clouds of pink fill the page." "Those blocks are called quads." "The pen dried out." "It smells sour."

Descriptions convey in language what the child can perceive presently—what the child is now seeing, hearing, feeling, touching, smelling. Descriptions are the essence of being informative. Children hear the vocabulary encoding what they perceive. Descriptions make the acquisition of language easier and provide the power language gives to cognition. Descriptions give children freedom to attend to their interests, to be who they are in the moment, to explore, to invent, and to create.

Narrations

"You brought the stapler." "Jenny is folding the scarves." "You are filling it up to the very top." "Mark is handing out the cups." "Carlos joins us." "You hung up your coat."

Narrations put the child's actions into words as the child is doing it—like a sports announcer delivering play-by-play coverage of events as they occur. Descriptions are about *input* (what the child is taking in through the senses); Narrations are about *output* (what the child is doing at that moment). Besides teaching verb vocabulary, narrations reinforce the child's own initiative, implicitly validating what the child chose to do. Often actions an adult narrates will be repeated. If you say, "You jumped down!" after a child jumps, the probability is high the child will jump again.

Narrations can, however, be counterproductive. Used too often for insignificant actions, they can be annoying: "You opened the door." "You are walking to your cubby." "You are removing your coat." Used for actions you do *not* value, they may increase the occurrence of inappropriate behavior: "You bumped the table." "You knocked over their building." The challenge is to sprinkle the Narrations on only those emerging behaviors you want to build.

Self-Talk

"I am watching you." "I'll be right back." "I have to go get the lunch." "I saw you and Yolanda at the store." "My cat keeps licking the butter." "I enjoy seeing your paintings." "I have towels if you need them."

Self-Talk is about the adult's own actions, experiences, and thoughts that relate to the child's current situation. Most Self-Talk statements begin with "I..." In the context of being careful to model what you intend for children, your expression of what you see, think, and experience helps them share similarly with you. Enterprise Talk encourages you to return to expressing yourself honestly. The gift you bring to children is who you are, uniquely.

Together, the three ways to talk—Descriptions, Narrations, and Self-Talk—help you find something to say when stopped by the prohibitions. For example:

> You are headed inside with Shasha who has just hurt her finger and is crying. Mark and Terrance are squabbling over something they found in the corner of the play yard. You hear both of them screaming and you know nothing of the cause.
>
> Enterprise Talk creates this kind of dialogue internally: "Mark, give it to me... Oops, direction. Stop arguing. Can't say that either. This is hard. Start with I... where am I in this?"
>
> In the interim, words such as these have a chance to be created: "I am headed inside with Shasha. I can't help you two boys right now. I do want to know what you found. Shasha is bleeding. I can talk to you while I get her a bandage, if you want."

It is not easy at first, but following these Guides will allow you to express yourself honestly and in turn help you focus on being the person you want to be.

Enterprise Talk also points the way to cultivating effective expression of positives: Nonverbal Recognition and Intrinsically Phrased Rewards. The more teachers support the children who are doing what they desire, the less they have to direct.

Nonverbal Recognition

Winking. Smiling. Sending a positive message in the way you hold your body. A funny expression on your face. Silly noises. Wooo! Zowie! Yeah-yeah-YEAH!

Nonverbal recognition communicates pleasure in valued behavior by facial expressions and body language. It is difficult to overstate the marvelous power and effectiveness of nonverbal positive communication. You can slap hands with a child at the beginning of the year and still have it be warm and delightful at the end of the year. Nonverbals never seem to wear out.

I know a school that decided to try a Nonverbal Recognition Day. For one day, all the teachers decided to give more nonverbal positives to everyone—the other teachers, the children, the parents, the

principal, the secretaries, the maintenance staff, the kitchen staff. They reported the best day ever. The children were happier, they behaved better, they worked harder, and staff reconfirmed their enthusiasm for their jobs.

Intrinsically Phrased Rewards

An *enterprise* classroom is self-perpetuating. Children keep taking initiative to be creative and responsible for *intrinsic* reasons, because their lives are richer, not because the adults are extrinsically reinforcing them with candy or stickers.

Examples of intrinsic rewards include the following: I brush my teeth because I feel better. I enjoy painting. I like having new ideas. I am a teacher because I find joy in enhancing the lives of others.

In the attempt to understand how to highlight for children their own positive feelings, I amassed as many words as I could find that described the satisfactions that support doing difficult and challenging endeavors. I culled the list to those that applied most directly to children and found they fit into four clusters.

- *Enjoyment: "It's fun to do, isn't it?"*
  pleasure, delight, happiness, thrill, joy, amusement, gratification, good feelings, savoring that inside, pride, satisfaction
- *Competence: "You did it!"*
  success, mastery, having the know-how, expertise, accomplishment, achievement, attainment, having a skill, able, capable
- *Cleverness: "That's tricky."*
  new ideas, uniqueness, brainy, smart, intelligent, bright, witty, sharp, ingenious, quick, original
- *Growth: "You're sure getting bigger!"*
  ready for new challenges, older now, choosing something new, more grown-up, more independent

We cannot provide intrinsic rewards, but we can talk about them as existing in our minds. To offer an Intrinsically Phrased Reward, I place one of these intrinsic concepts in a sentence that either talks about similar feelings in myself or offers that name for a feeling as a tentative possibility to describe the child's experience.

For example, a child shows me her painting. I can use each cluster to create a possible response:

> "I sure enjoy painting, too!"
>
> "You are indeed a painter."
>
> "It feels good to create something totally new, doesn't it?"
>
> "You couldn't paint like that last year!"

I found thinking of ways to phrase these comments was difficult to do in the beginning. I posted the cluster list on a large chart where I could refer to it and parents could see it, too.

When teachers highlight naturally occurring feelings of self-worth and self-satisfaction that accompany competent and socially constructive behavior in an authentic way, children light up with smiles.

One Way to Lead: Descriptive Cue Sequence

The Descriptive Cue Sequence addresses the problem of what to say in situations when you think it is imperative that children do what you have in mind, for example, getting them to clean up, put on their coats, or wash their hands. Using the steps in order, the teacher offers a way for children to take the initiative to act. Starting with the least control necessary each time, the sequence gradually obviates the need to direct.

The sequence begins with a cue, such as, "It's time to…" or a physical signal that means it is time to start—bell, flashing lights, or music:

1. Wait and respond. The teacher lets children respond to the signal within a reasonable length of time (approximately 15 to 20 seconds), recognizing children who take desirable actions with Descriptions, Narrations, or Nonverbal Recognition.
2. Describe what needs doing or where things associated with the action are. "The pens go back to the holder. Your coats are in your lockers."

3. Model the behavior you desire while describing your thoughts and decisions aloud with Self-talk. "This pen is left out. If it has no cap, it will dry out. I wonder where the cap is. Ah! There it is. I will put it on and place it where it is ready for use tomorrow." This demonstration may be used when the action is unfamiliar. If well known, the teacher simply uses Self-talk.

4. Issue a clear direction if, after a time, a child fails to voluntarily join the effort. While some children may take it upon themselves to do what is necessary, some children will resist. It may be possible to let the resistant alone until they choose to join in on their own initiative. If they do not, a direction may be appropriate.

5. Set a contingency. Teachers restrict participation in the next activity until the completion of the desired action. "When the water is off the floor, you can continue to play."

The sequence can be listed on a wall for teachers and parents to see. The procedure often stimulates conversations among the adults about compliance, responsibility, and respect for children.

Competency Acquisition—Making it Natural

Enterprise Talk is testable. Each of these six Guides is both observable and measurable. If it works, it is *right*. Creating new habits is never easy. According to Richard Boyatzis (1982), the acquisition of new competencies flows through six stages:

- Recognition—learning a new competency exists.
- Comprehension—understanding it by taking action to commence the process of acquiring the distinctions; trying it in one's life.
- Self-assessment—devising a way to assess the reality of performance in order for the learner to isolate deficits and hold onto strengths.
- Experimentation—playing around for a period of time, trying this way and that, modifying, ignoring, or changing, to see how something works in different situations.
- Practice—making a commitment to act this way 100% of the time, for at least a year.
- Natural Ability—letting go of the guides, when a handrail is no longer needed.

For self-assessment, I recommend sticking a piece of tape on the back of one hand and using a marker to tally. Most people start by counting the number of directions they give children for 20 minutes during a difficult time of the day. Afterwards, it is easy to stick the tape onto a record chart for comparisons over time. All nine components of Enterprise Talk are easy to count. The challenge is to decrease the Prohibitions—Directions, Questions, and Praise—and increase the Guides—Descriptions, Narrations, Self-Talk, Nonverbal Recognition, Intrinsically Phrased Rewards, and Descriptive Cue Sequence.

Teachers who have had the greatest success in implementing Enterprise Talk decided as a team to help each other out. They set goals for the week and eased the risks by laughing with each other over the struggle to change old habits. One teacher commented, "Using Enterprise Talk is like learning to swallow differently."

The Possibility of Integrity and Authenticity

Teachers of all age groups, infants to adults, have taken on the challenge of Enterprise Talk. People I know who have counted their talk habits and committed themselves to change are happier with their children and happier with themselves. No one I have known has ever wanted to return to the old way of being. Here is a sample of their words:

> Narration really stood out for me. Not only is it easy to do, but it takes the place of so much baloney I used to do. Much of that was simply to get my daughter to do things without igniting World War III. My old talk, "Good job, Tim. What a good boy!" has changed to "I see you cleaned your room." I had no idea this was so powerful. It works! Narration not only helps keep my children more aware of what is happening around them, it keeps them actively involved. My daughter starts to do all kinds of things when I start to narrate actions that I think are positive. My children love

to hear me say what they are doing loud enough for others to hear. I have a lot of practice ahead, but I hope to be very good at using all the components of Enterprise Talk.

The hardest part for me is not praising children's efforts, but I found yesterday that giving the children a high-five and smiling at them when they did a "correct" action (looking both ways before crossing the road) worked much better than stopping them and praising them. They were quite right to be proud. I did not remind them of anything, and they watched for cars by themselves.

Enterprise Talk is a different approach to guiding children, and even adults, in learning. The idea of no directions, no questions, and no praise was foreign to my understanding of an appropriate way to teach. In fact, when I first heard about it, I was a little blown away. Of the six components, the most unusual for me was self-talk. I tried starting sentences with "I think..." or "I see..." to give the children suggestions on how to proceed in their activities. The results were astounding! I found the children were responding in such a way I never thought they could. Instead of giving an order, such as telling a child to pick up when she was done, I used self-talk. I said, "I see the art center still has some tissue paper and glue left out." The child I wanted to influence looked up, so I said, "I think the art area would be so much nicer if it was tidy for the next person who comes to do art." Then I stepped back and watched the results. The child I addressed the comment to (without a direction) stood up, walked over to the art area, and cleaned up the remainder of the tissue. He even straightened the papers in the paper box! I was amazed. Instead of saying, "Great job," I responded with "I think the art area is a lot more fun to be in when it is straightened up." The child looked a me with an expression of satisfaction on his face.

I invite you to step into a new future in your teaching. Enterprise Talk provides the opportunity for you to be proactive in becoming less controlling of children, honestly representing your values and your own desire to be fully present to them. The possibility is in your hands to create a future of *integrity*—actually being the teacher you say you are—and of *authenticity*—opening yourself honestly in each moment to the children you guide.

Nothing in Enterprise Talk tells you what to say or how to act. You make those decisions yourself—from your humanity—from being present moment to moment—from full participation in your relationship with children—approaching the richness to be gained from acting with integrity and authenticity. All who are willing to explore Enterprise Talk will attain a deeper understanding of leadership in teaching and be better able to create a classroom of happy, energetic, and enterprising children.

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